Chapter I

State of Wisconsin IT: Destroying the Barriers to Borderless Government

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Executive Summary

Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle inherited a $3.2 billion deficit when he took office in January 2003. His plans to institute a meaningful, long-term fix to the state’s budget problems included using technology to streamline state government and build the foundation for ongoing cost savings. State CIO Matt Miszewski assumed he would have to carry out the governor’s directive without any additional funds for information technology (IT), but then the legislature pushed through an additional $40 million cut to IT funding across state agencies. This case study describes the strategies Miszewski and his colleagues in the state’s Division of Enterprise Technology devised, and are in the process of implementing, to deal with having to do much more with considerably less.

Background

When Governor Jim Doyle came into office in January 2003, he inherited a $3.2 billion biennial deficit in the state’s general fund, based on projected revenue vs. required spend-
ing obligations. No Wisconsin governor had ever faced that much of a shortfall—not even close. State government had been operating amid structural deficits (the amount of money needed to maintain current services exceeding the revenue generated by the state’s current tax system) at least since the mid-1990s (Reschovsky, 2002), and it was up to the new governor to make the difficult choices needed to produce a balanced budget—not just on paper, but in practice.

Governor Doyle also resolved to fix the state’s budget without raising taxes, despite assertions on both sides of the aisle that it could never be done. But his 12 years as Wisconsin attorney general and his analysis of the state’s financial mechanisms convinced him the problem was not that Wisconsin residents and businesses were paying too little—the problem was how the state’s elected officials and public-sector organizations were using the money. Wisconsin government needed fundamental change in its approach to both budgeting and spending, and government units, both at the state and local levels, had to thoroughly reassess how they did business together. That was the only way to protect Wisconsin taxpayers and preserve the state’s traditional priorities of excellence in education, affordable health care, quality local services, and a clean environment.

Governor Doyle’s work to produce a more efficient and effective government for Wisconsin residents is by no means finished, especially considering the continuing financial pressures at all public-sector levels. But he has produced two consecutive biennial budgets that balanced the books while maintaining Wisconsin’s commitment to first-rate schools and public services. He also has made streamlining state government and building the groundwork for ongoing cost savings a top priority. His ACE (Accountability, Consolidation and Efficiency) Initiative is accomplishing this by focusing on efficiencies in four key areas: information technology (IT), procurement, state facilities and human resources. The governor’s approach to IT is one that most citizens can identify with, even if it has made my life as State CIO considerably more complicated. He correctly points out that citizens do not care about the supposedly unique needs of individual government agencies, or branches of government, or levels of government. Citizens believe that, through information technology, governments have what they need to work together, to communicate in common formats, to streamline services, to make government less expensive, and to make citizen interactions with government quick and easy. In contrast, I could point out the complex way in which government IT has evolved, and the fact that the public-sector IT environment is still characterized primarily by organizational silos and legacy systems. I could point out that traditional budgeting and funding procedures—that is, agency-by-agency, often with jurisdictional blinders on, an approach that, try though we might, we can’t change overnight—actually discourage collaboration.

But it would not matter. Governor Doyle agrees with his constituents. Government IT professionals have the tools we need. We already have the technologies necessary to make government more citizen-centered, share information, integrate systems, save money, and make those savings available for our schools, our infrastructure, and the health and prosperity of our families. The governor insists that what we have been missing is the organizational component—namely, the political and administrative resolve to collaborate across agencies and jurisdictions, and the determination to achieve integrated government services without additional funding and without waiting for budget processes to catch up. So, regardless of any protests I could come up with (which, quite honestly, I’m not inclined
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